

Butterflies in your garden



As natural habitats decrease due to building and changes in land use, our gardens are becoming increasingly important for the survival of butterflies. We all like to see these pretty insects flying around in our gardens so need to provide the right plants to attract them. However, not all butterflies feed on flowers as some, like the Red Admiral, are also attracted to tree sap and rotting fruit and others, such as the Speckled Wood, to honey dew, the sugary liquid produced by greenflies and blackflies.

Which butterfly species visit your garden will vary depending on the area in which you live, especially whether you are close to agricultural land, woodland or meadows, for it is in these places that most of our sixty different kinds of butterflies find wild plants on which to lay their eggs and develop into adults. Stinging nettles, thistles and grasses are widely distributed and are chosen by a number of our common butterflies.

Each species of butterfly lays its eggs on its caterpillars' food plant. If you have, or are planning, a wildlife area in your garden you may consider planting for butterflies, but if you grow cabbages and lettuces you may not welcome them as they will enjoy eating these before you do! With a little practice you will soon be able to see the tiny eggs which are laid either singly or in clusters on the stems and undersides of leaves. You can then watch them develop into caterpillars that feed and grow into even larger caterpillars and then transform into adults by way of the pupal (chrysalis) stage. Most people do not notice the eggs until their attention is drawn to the feeding caterpillars by the holes that appear in the leaves of their plants.

Wherever the butterflies have developed, you may well wish to attract them to your garden to drink nectar from your flowers. Some plants like buddleia attract a variety of butterflies, to the extent that it is commonly called the 'butterfly bush'. Many other common garden plants are valuable sources of nectar for butterflies, such as aubrietia and lavender. There are many more and if you find one that butterflies find inviting then why not plant more next year.